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PRE-GENEVA CONFERENCE DEVELOPMENTS - II

Participation in the Korean Political Conference: Canada, Colombia, New Zealand, Australia, the Philippines and Thailand have now formally accepted invitations to the Korean Political Conference, and there are indications that Belgium will likewise attend. Netherlands Foreign Minister Luns told American officials at The Hague on 4 March that his government "also will probably participate." South Africa has declined to attend. This brings to 15 the number of Communist and non-Communist states which have formally or tentatively accepted invitations.

American efforts to invite South Korea remain stymied. Foreign Minister Pyun told Ambassador Briggs on 5 March that all matters pertaining to the conference were in the hands of President Rhee who will not return from vacation until about 8 March.

Indications of Soviet strategy at Geneva: The first concrete indications of Moscow's attitude toward specific issues to be discussed at Geneva came on 4 March. The counselor of the Soviet embassy in London told American diplomats that the Communists have no new proposals to make on Korea and that there is little likelihood of progress toward unification unless the United States has something additional to offer. He said that if the present division of Korea is to continue indefinitely, there probably will be "ample opportunity" to develop communications and economic relations between the two areas, as in the case of Germany.

Regarding Indochina, he suggested that if the United States and France object to an amalgamation of the Vietnam and Viet Minh administrations, "they can agree to a division along the 16th parallel." Such a solution, he said, would "tend to guarantee" China's southern frontier.

The solution put forward for Indochina gives no indication of a desire for an early settlement. France recognizes that partition, with the loss of the heavily populated, strategic Tonkin delta, would probably soon be followed by Communist control of the whole country. Moreover, the Vietnamese would not agree to enter a coalition government with the Viet Minh. It is possible that the Communists might propose a cease-fire in order to seize the propaganda initiative at Geneva while leaving details of a truce to be worked out by prolonged negotiations.

State Dept. review completed

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India may desire to mediate Indochina question: On 4 March Indian UN delegate Menon indicated that India might be willing to act as a mediator in Indochina. He also stated that while India would have no observers at Geneva, he planned to visit there prior to 26 April. These statements, as well as Prime Minister Nehru's cease-fire proposal of 22 February, suggest that while India may disclaim direct interest in the Indochina question and apparently believes it will not be invited to Geneva in any capacity, it will probably seek an opportunity to intervene there as it did in Korea.

France undecided on participation of Associated States: The American embassy in Paris has reported that the French position on attendance of the Associated States will be largely determined by the latter, the United States, and Britain. The Associated States have not themselves taken a stand, but there is feeling in Paris that they might be unwilling to attend if the Viet Minh is present. The American embassy in Saigon feels that much good will could be gained if the French promptly announced that the Associated States would be represented.

Laniel says Geneva talks do not rule out truce prior to 26 April: Premier Laniel told the French Assembly on 5 March that the Geneva conference did not rule out an armistice in Indochina before 26 April. He left the impression, however, that the French government would rather seek a solution at Geneva than by a direct deal with Ho Chi Minh.

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Vietnamese concern rising over Geneva discussions:

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The Vietnamese defense minister on 4 March told the American chargé that the prospect of the conference has shaken the Vietnamese people and has had a disastrous effect on Vietnamese morale. The defense minister may have exaggerated the local reaction, possibly in an attempt to insure a firm American position against negotiations with the Viet Minh.

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